Hollywood has been described as a place, an industry, a state of mind -- but making it in Hollywood, and making movies, persist as part of the American dream. In the real world of agents, casting directors, aspiring actors and directors, and studio executives -- how do movies get made? In "Hollywood Dreams", Frontline looks at the fantasy and reality of Hollywood and the movie business.

Drasnin Quotes

"We know about Hollywood from four generations of press agents, publicists and promoters -- but they haven't told us much about the real Hollywood, about how movies really get made. To understand Hollywood, and the movies, you shouldn't go to the movie palaces, the theaters, but to the office buildings and executive suites where the deals are made. That's what producer Ira Drasnin did, in pursuit of "Hollywood Dreams."

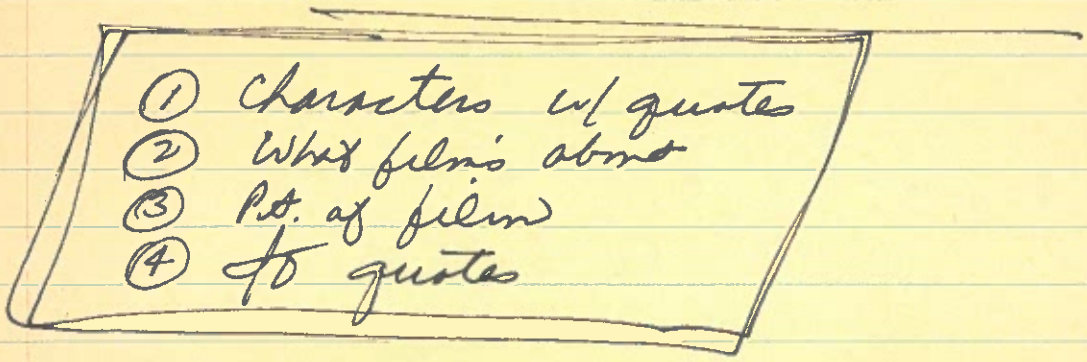
"You may have thought the most important technology in Hollywood was the camera and microphone. It's not. It's the telephone. You get the definite impression that without the telephone, there would be no movies."

"We argue about the movies as expressions of art or commerce. We discuss them as issues of mass culture or mass entertainment. We spend millions to make them, and millions more to see them. Yet, we don't really know much about the movies, about how they get made -- not on location with directors and stars, but in office buildings, by agents, casting directors and studio executives."

"In the real world of Hollywood, there's enough action and drama to fill a thousand movie screens with what ordinary people would take to be fantasy."

"In some ways, Hollywood's a different world. And, in some ways, it's a very familiar world. Fantasy and reality come together in Hollywood -- and to understand one, you have to understand the other. We've taken the Fantasy Tour -- with some unscheduled stops at some very real places that tell us something about how movies get made, and about ourselves."

Took the Fantasy Tour but made some unscheduled stops — a look behind the scenes at the movie business: at the world's biggest talent agency, the casting directors' office, an acting class, executive offices of a major studio, where



Hollywood

Cast of characters

Jeremy Zimmer: A 27-year old agent with International Creative Management, the largest talent agency in the world, is the grandson of [redacted] one-time MGM studio head Dory Schary. Zimmer represents writers and directors, and credits himself with the packaging of the film "Revenge of the Nerds," among others.

On making movies: "Making movies is very hard. Here in our office, it sure doesn't look like we are [making movies], but we are. And it's hard out there...There's egos and battles of will between the studios and stars and directors and writers and the producers--and it's nuts."

On why bad movies get made: "It's about people's judgement. It's not a perfect medium...There's eight, ten guys who decide fifty to seventy-five per cent of the the movis tha get made. They'r guys just like me, who are just older. They're fallible, and they divorce their wives, drink, and make mistakes and have shitty days. And they make bad decisions sometimes. It's okay."

On survival in Hollywood: "It's knowing the inevitable, which is, [redacted] ...as soon as you're in, you've got to realize you're going to be out. With an agent, you've got to know that your clients are going to leave you...and with a studio job, you've got to know you're going to get fired...So survival is trying not to kill too many people too quickly.

Bill Block: A 31-year old ICM agent, Block has a degree in history from Columbia University. Like Zimmer, he represents writers and directors. Block packaged the recent film "Runaway Train," which received Oscar nominations in the Best Actor (Jon Voight) and Best Supporting Actor categories.

Block says he talks to 150 people a day on the telephone, and reads 700 scripts per year.

Here Block on what "winning" is to an agent: "To get the movie made--that is the bottom line...Winning the deal is not good enough. Getting the deal closed is step one. And we really try to then bring every pressure, point of view--whatever it takes--to bear on the given project and get it made. And if they're not going to make it, to get it back, so we can try to get somebody else to make it. Winning is geting the movie made. Whether the movie works or not, I don't know. But we've done our job to the best of our ability if we get it made."

Scott Rudin: Only 27 years old, Rudin has risen to the rank of executive vice president of production at 20th Century Fox. [redacted] Rudin spends his days and nights on the phone, at meetings and at breakfast, lunches and dinners, courting "talent" for Fox and trying to find the (approximately) fifteen pictures a year the studio will agree to finance. Rudin on the pressure a studio executive faces: "You can have the most well-run organization, you can have the most beautiful lot, the most terrific relationships with talent, you can have everybody in town wanting to work with you, wanting to bring their pictures here. But if you say yes when you should have said no, or no when you should have said yes, you're out of business."

On how a movie gets made: "Sombody falls in love with it and stands... some place, screaming into the wind long and loud. And sombody else hears. That's really the only avenue...This is a process of advocacy."

John Miller: Miller is a director and recent graduate of the nation's oldest film school, at the [redacted] University of Sothern California. Miller made a student film at USC, which was good enough, to get him an agent at the prestigious William Moris Agency along with meetings at studios all

over town. But he has yet to get an offer to direct his first feature film.

Miller on USC film students: "The system that is USC film school is very similar to Hollywood. And I think when you first get to USC, people really are thinking about the films they want to make. When they leave USC, ~~people are really thinking about the films they want to make.~~ they're thiking about the deals they want to make--and they're really two different things."

On becoming a Hollywood film maker: "No sensible person becomes a film-maker. You have to be a little nuts. You have to be driven by something other than logic. Because logic doesn't land you in Los Angeles."

On Hollywood meetings: "I find myself in these meetings where the concept being kicked around is something I think is the dumbest idea I've ever heard. And I won't say that any more. Because I've realized as just par for the course I'm supposed to say 'It's great, I love it!' You can't be totally honest...If they ask about an idea you have and you say, 'Well, I think it's pretty good and it would make a good film, and it would make a little money,' they don't want to hear that. That means it's death. That means it's the worst film I ever made."

Mike Fenton: One of Hollywood's most important casting directors, Fenton has cast such hit movies as E.T., Back to the Future, Raiders of the Lost Ark, One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest and Godfather II. He's spent 25 years in the movie business.

Fenton on the difference between actors today and actors 25 years ago: "In the old days, if I wanted to be an actor, and if I were lucky enough to be attractive enough, to be exciting enough to be the type of personality the studio was looking for, the studio might put me under contract at $100 a week, or $200 a week. But at the same time, they would send me to school. They would have me learn how to swordfight, they'd have me learn how to speak and how to walk and how to act...And today, the agents will find somebody, not groom them, hope that they can act [and] send them to us. And if they have a certain personality that we like, we'll introduce them to a director. And if the director likes them...we'll read them. And if they read very well, and if they're real right for the part, we might test them."

On who makes it in Hollywood: "It's the old adage, you can walk into a studio lot, and turn right and bump into a director, and that director might say, 'Joe, are you an actor?' And Joe says 'Yes!' And he says, 'Wonderful, you're just what I'm looking for.' Or you could have turned left, and been run down by the prop truck."